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AUTHOR Langford, Frances P.
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ABSTRACT

An examination of international adult education programs that have proved to be successful indicates that the key elements of success are nonmaterial in nature. Unity in spirit and action, equality of the sexes, elimination of prejudice, practice of the art of consultation, trustworthiness, and the preservation of human dignity and honor appear to be the basic principles for success in international adult education programs. After the failure of many of its original international adult education programs, the United Nations began reconsidering its field operations in the areas of education and social and economic development. It began revising its original top-down approach and promoting smaller, grassroots efforts through local or nongovernmental agencies. Increasingly, the United Nations and the World Bank began to encourage and focus on community participation. Despite their emphasis on upsetting the existing order and elevating the masses, the Marxist and Freirian models were much like other Western models of international adult education in that they are all based on a paternalistic attitude that viewed villagers as helpless and without means or dignity. Because of these attitudes, planners failed to consult with local residents when designing programs. This undermined any hope of unity of effort, which in turn resulted in disgruntlement and rebellion on the part of those toward whom the programs were targeted. What is needed instead of this paternalistic attitude is a dynamic relationship of spiritual trust between participants (educators and learners) and material means to create solutions to world problems. (MN)

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Successful International Adult Education Programs

Frances P. Langford
University of Southern Maine
Gorham, Maine 04038

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Successful International Adult Education Programs

Introduction

Successful program designs embody certain basic principles displayed in particular educational, social and economic development projects around the world. Clear conceptual understanding of these basic principles will assist adult educators in the empowerment of the individual and the planning of valuable programming. Successful adult education projects taken from the international field of development will be described and compared to less successful models. The changing approaches of the international development agencies as they confront their successes and failures in the field will be documented. The United Nations, the World Bank, Freire's model of literacy for revolution and other Marxist models will be explored.

The key elements of success are non-material in nature. Unity in spirit and action, equality of the sexes, elimination of prejudice, practicing the art of consultation, trustworthiness and the preservation of human dignity and honour are the basic principles for success. Inclusion of these principles in adult education programming and services is creating a powerful and far-reaching effect.

Discussion of successful international adult education programs requires a clear understanding from the start of the concept of 'success.' This presentation considers the very long view of success - one which includes concepts such as unity

amongst peoples, elimination of all kinds of prejudice (sex, economic, nationality, racial) peace, preservation of human honour, practicing the fine art of consultation, promoting self-reliance and self-sufficiency and generally uplifting the existence of all mankind through the application of these principles.

The Historical Setting

With the creation of the League of Nations and then the United Nations after World War II, consultations began between nations on how to achieve lasting world peace. These consultations led to the belief that economic inequalities, poverty, health, and education were key elements to the promotion of a new world order. The United Nations set up 'field operations' to assist in rebuilding war-torn Europe, and gradually these operations expanded to include what we now call 'third world' member countries of the United Nations. Programs were designed to assist in the technological, medical and educational advancement of these less advantaged countries. The belief, at that time, was that a higher educational level would promote a greater role of technology which would increase a country's wealth. (Midgely, et. al)

Concomitant with these efforts was the expanding awareness that the affairs of the world were more interdependent than previously believed. Citizens of 'western' countries saw how people of other lands lived; images of water-hauling, rural existence, un-paved roads, poor health facilities, malnourished

children, etc. promoted an upsurge of brotherly love and kindliness on the part of wealthier nations to uplift the material existence of the peoples in other lands.

So began the massive planning/implementation/failures that these western agencies engaged in with the best of intentions but lacking some basic knowledge of how to truly 'help'.

The Adult Education Model

Coles, in his book Adult Education in Developing Countries includes the Declaration of the Montreal World Conference on Adult Education and the Draft Recommendation on the development of Adult Education for UNICEF.

> Survival requires that the countries of the world must learn to live together in peace. "Learn" is the operative word. Mutual respect, understanding, sympathy are qualities that are destroyed by ignorance and fostered by knowledge. In the field of international understanding, adult education in today's divided world takes on a new importance.
>
> Provided that man learns to survive, he has in front of him opportunities for social development and personal well-being such as have never been open to him before.
>
> Those powers of mind and those qualities of spirit which have given to mankind an abiding heritage of values and judgement must continue everywhere to find, in our changing patterns of day-to-day living, full scope for maturing and flowering in an enriched culture. This and nothing less is the goal of adult education. (Coles, 153)

The following are excerpts of the draft recommendation of that conference to UNICEF:

> ...and of ensuring better understanding and more effective collaboration between the generations and greater political, social and economic equality between social groups and between the sexes,
>
> ...adult education as an integral part of life long education can contribute decisively to economic and cultural development, social progress and world peace as well as to the development of educational systems,
>
> ...the universal concern for literacy as being a crucial factor in political and economic development...(Coles, 157, 158)

These statements regard the role of adult education as one of promoting the evolution of the affairs of the world. Successful programs, therefore, promote this advancement. This effort requires a great dedication to the non-material principals mentioned above, which are moral principals. Do we teach African tribesmen to give up their long-held feuds for the greater good? Or do we settle for primary school buildings and curricula, begging off of these moral issues? The answer is that any development program can be successful if, and only if it does actively incorporate these moral standards. Otherwise, what is the point?

The Adult Education Model set forward by Coles addresses these issues in theory, but not adequately in practice. Rather, the bulk his recommendations revolve around political goals, bureaucracy and curricula.

The United Nations/Western Models of Development

Today, the United Nations has reconsidered all of its field operations in the areas of education, social and economic development. The original top-down approach has proved a dismal failure. Smaller, grassroots efforts are being promoted through local agencies or through non-governmental agencies and/or religious groups. (Vick, 1983) The United Nations realized that the planning teams in the great metropolises of New York, Paris and Geneva were ill-equipped to envision what would really 'help' the target populations. The U.N. planners began to make use of in-place smaller agencies which were better barometers to the needs of the people. (Midgely, 1986, Vick, 1983)

Along with this change of scale and focus came the concept of 'community participation', where the people themselves become engaged in the planning process. This is the latest United Nations model. The president of the World Bank, an arm of the United Nations, declared that none of the programs conducted to date had worked because the developers and planners thought they knew more than the people they were trying to help. (Vick, 1983) Hence, the need for the newer model of community participation.

But even with this new model difficulties continue to arise because of the lack of depth of participation and consultation required of the target groups.

Sweden has been creating water projects in third world countries and in a recent report declared that 90% of their projects were defunct. These projects were 'ideal' from a

development statepoint in that they included very simple technologies and a great deal of training. Once again, the helper has misinterpreted how best to 'help'. "The assumption that the proponents of community participation know what local people want and need pervades the literature." (Midgely, 1986)

Non-material development

Wealthier countries have contributed to agencies whose primary goal is to uplift the material existence of people perceived as less fortunate and bereft. The focus has been on the material aspects of living. But money and material resources have very little to do with the real development of peoples. "...for real development must depend on the balanced growth of the person, both as an economic and social being. (Coles, 4) There has been a great deal of paternalism in these relationships; a strong impression that the villager is helpless and without means or dignity. As a result of this paternalistic attitude - apparent in Marxist, Freirian and western approaches - is the lack of consultation with the participants in the planning of interventions. This lack of consultation undermines any hope of unity of effort, which is at the core of any successful human effort. When one party decides what is best for another - the result is often disgruntlement and rebellion on the part of the target of assistance.

There is an underlying lack of appreciation of the importance of human dignity and honor on behalf of the planners of these interventions. Slowly, this has been changing. Programs which do incorporate some the moral principles of development have had startling successes.

Consultation, Unity of Spirit and Action, and Dignity

There is a story, worth the telling here. A Canadian development worker was sent to a village and saw that the women of that village were hauling water miles every day while there appeared to be a spring of fresh water bubbling out of the mountainside adjacent to the village. When this development worker determined that this would be an ideal site for piped water, he approached the chief of the village (part of the U.N. blueprint for successful development - approval from the chief) and described the problem and the plan. The chief gathered his council together and agreed that this Canadian had a good idea. But, they said, could he first help them to build a soccer field because they loved to play soccer and would be able to compete better with adjacent villages if they had their own village field? The Canadian agreed (another part of the U.N. blueprint for success- be agreeable). The villagers all pitched in and they built a wonderful field and when it was finished the Canadian said that now everyone could concentrate on building the new water system. The council gathered together again, consulted and agreed. But first, wouldn't this competent worker help them to build a road that would allow soccer teams to come to play in

their village and vice versa? The Canadian couldn't very well refuse but he didn't know how to build roads so he wrote away to his development agency for road building instructions, studied up on it, and all the men of the village pitched in and they built themselves a wonderful road. By this time that development worker was tired and went back to Canada for a vacation. Upon his return he noticed a pipe running down from the hill. He was surprised and delighted that the villagers had gone on ahead without him and built their own water system. He regaled the chief and villagers for their hard work and efforts. The chief explained that they were so grateful to the Canadian for helping them to build a soccer field and a road that they built this water system for the Canadian.

A Changing World Order

The approaches towards development and education of the United Nations and World Bank are programmed to work in the framework of the existing world order, and the attempts at development are material in nature in that the western countries are trying to pull the 'third world' countries 'up to' the western level of material progress. Educational models are taken from the western models incorporating primary, secondary and tertiary schooling systems. Fitzgerald refers to the inappropriateness of the United States' attempt at helping the third world country of Palau this way,"..for even under the best of circumstances there will always be a problem of proportion. The United States has always dealt with Palau in terms of its own

vast abstractions - and over the years Palauans have grown wise to this tyranny of scale. They have seen how American solutions overwhelm their problems and - without intention- devastate their fragile social and natural ecology." (Fitzgerald, 1987).

Is it really to these countries' best interests to make them in the image of, let's say, the United States?

Marxist Development

Marxist development, on the other hand, is seeking to upset the existing order and uplift the masses, in that the masses somehow embody all that is good and right. Freire, in his book Pedagogy in Process describes his attempts at collaboration with the common people in their efforts to subvert that existing world order of domination through literacy. He says that he uses collaboration rather than domination to uplift and enlighten the masses promoting their self-esteem, self-knowledge and self-reliance. He seems to truly promote the dignity of a section of mankind - the downtrodden and dominated. Yet once, as we see in all communist countries, the downtrodden have overthrown the 'powers that be', the new system inherently embodies many of the ills that it was intended to eradicate: inequalities, domination, prejudice. The intent of Marxist philosophy is to ensure liberation and equality, yet the methods of change don't go to the root of human nature and don't seem to speak to those non-material elements of human existence that truly make us different from the beast. The qualities of trustworthiness, human dignity and honor (not just for the 'masses') elimination

of all forms of prejudice (both for the rich and the poor, women and men, the educated and non-educated, etc.) are not addressed. Marxist efforts lack one ingredient for success, particularly - and that is unity. True, unity of the masses is a watchword of these efforts, but the intent is to split the bourgeoisie away. This attempt to split a society requires use of unjust treatment of the bourgeoisie, which is an immoral act. It also promotes prejudice between the economic sectors of a society. This disunity and prejudice will doom all these efforts to failure in the long term.

Them and Us

With all of these approaches we still see a change agent, the 'knower' and the 'unaware', the 'helpers' and the ones to be helped. There are many cases of the people themselves, bereft of United Nations programs, Freire's literacy workers, and Swedish water systems who decide upon their own needs. In Kenya, the people in the smaller villages determined that the government schools were too distant and did not teach their children well enough, so they began the 'harambee' schools, staffed by local people and funded by the villages. In Cartegena, Columbia the poor slum dwellers have set up "bench schools" for the children 4-7 years old to prepare these children for the primary schools. The bench schools (the children bring their own benches) represent "the poor community's spontaneous response to the inadequacy of state educational facilities." (Hall in Midgely, 1986)

The people are uplifting their circumstances and becoming self-sufficient and self-reliant through their own response to their environment. These grassroots efforts conduce to the preservation of human diginity and honor.

The idea of helping others

The wellsprings of human feeling for those perceived as less well off upwell from the reservoirs of compassion within the human heart. Filipinos have great compassion and concern for the elderly in U.S. society. Filipinos consider Americans as bereft of love for their parents because Americans put their parents into nursing homes, rather than care for them themselves. Palauans feel such sorrow for Americans because we drive our children from the home at age 18. Skyrocketing drug abuse and the breakup of the family are other perceived ills. What kinds of social and economic development programming would be appropriate to implement for the American public to address these social problems? Would Americans accept programming which had its origination from Palau or Zaire?

Reflections on our feelings of compassion and on lasting efforts at improving the conditions of life on this planet are appropriate for adult educators.

A Dynamic Coherence

That there is a "dynamic coherence between the spiritual and practical requirements of life on earth" (Universal House of Justice, 1983) is a key concept to

remember in designing and implementing adult education interventions. Without the awareness of the necessary moral prerequisites to human effort, failed programming and disunity will prevail. The example of a 'bucket brigade' putting out a fire is useful. The end goal is to put out a fire, and the people line up, one end of the line nearest the fire, the other near the water supply. Each member trusts the other, and that trust is the foundation to a successful effort. They all trust the member nearest the water to fill the bucket; each trusts the other to pass the bucket and then to take the bucket, and they all trust that the one nearest the fire will pour the water onto the fire and not on the ground.

A dynamic relationship of trust (spiritual) between participants and material means (buckets, water and people) create solutions to worldly problems. This very simple situation highlights the foundational aspect of the quality of trustworthiness in the solving of a very material problem. With this concept of dynamic coherence in use, adult education efforts will become effective and powerful tools for implementing the wide ranging changes envisioned by the United Nations, Freire, Marxist efforts and the goals of the international community of adult educators.

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